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Deputy Secretary  
Northern Ireland Department of the  
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Stormont  
BELFAST

Your reference

Our reference

Date September 1977

SECURITY MEASURES ON NORTHERN IRELAND FLIGHTS

I enclose a copy of a draft NASC paper which covers the Meeting of 7 September 1977. I should be grateful to have your comments as soon as possible.

2 Denis Gildea is putting up a submission to the Minister enclosing the draft to give him the opportunity to comment and discuss the paper before it is circulated to NASC members. He is advising him to delay a meeting with the MPs until early November.

3 I am copying this letter and enclosures to Denis Gildea, Roy Farmery, Ken Ritchley, Bob Whalley (HO), and Brian Walters. I enclose a copy for you to pass on to Major Turner. I should also welcome their comments.

G M STARK

DRAFT NASC PAPERSecurity Measures on Northern Ireland Flights

Mr Stanley Clinton Davies, MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Companies Aviation and Shipping, asked the Department of Trade to reconsider the security measures on Northern Ireland flights. The report which follows is the result of discussions involving officials from the Department the Northern Ireland Department of the Environment and the Ministry of Defence. The Minister has invited the National Aviation Security Committee to discuss its content and comments on the conclusions.

## BACKGROUND

2 The Committee are aware of the <sup>stringent</sup> ~~stringent~~ security measures which have been recommended for flights operating between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The Department introduced in July 1974, following the discovery of a bomb on board an aircraft on a flight to Belfast a measure which prohibited hand baggage on these flights with certain exceptions. Ladies are allowed to take one hand bag after a thorough search, civil servants brief cases containing official papers, and all passengers are permitted to take papers or books either loose or in a manilla folder. There is no security justification for accepting ladies hand bags; this was done out of common courtesy.

3 This measure which was <sup>w</sup>idely welcomed by passengers, airlines, airports authorities and trade unions at the time, has met with increasing opposition from passengers and from politicians whose constituents they are, as time has elapsed with no repeat of the bomb incident. Other measures including the double search of passengers and hand baggage at Belfast have also been the subject of criticism.

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#### THE THREAT

- 4 Hijacking. The threat of hijacking on Northern Ireland flights is the same as that associated with other domestic flights. There is no intelligence to suggest that the PIRA wish to mount a hijacking operation. However, Northern Ireland flights are just as susceptible to hijacking by other terrorists groups, by criminals, ~~or~~ <sup>or</sup> by mentally unstable people as any other domestic flight. The threat is high but calls for no extra measures.
- 5 Sabotage of Aircraft in flight. The threat of sabotage of an aircraft in flight is higher on Northern Ireland flights than on other domestic flights. It is however assessed as relatively low, since there is little <sup>b</sup> probability of a suicidal saboteur. Nevertheless, the search of all baggage and special precautions for unaccompanied baggage and cargo are called for.
- 6 Sabotage of Aircraft on the ground. The threat from this is assessed as very high, particularly at Aldergrove Airport. It is essential that security measures taken are ~~straight enough~~ <sup>stringent enough</sup> to prevent the concealment of small quantities of explosives and bomb components which are extremely hard to detect, neither should opportunity ~~to be~~ afforded to the potential saboteur who may have succeeded despite the measures in avoiding the detection of such items to construct an explosive device <sup>under</sup> ~~made~~ cover of a case, ~~for~~ a plastic bag, <sup>or</sup> ~~on~~ some other suitable camouflage.
- 7 Airport sabotage. The threat of sabotage <sup>at</sup> ~~on~~ Aldergrove Airport is assessed as very high. The PIRA has <sup>st</sup> stated that it considers the airport to be a legitimate target. The possibility of sabotage at airports in Great Britain serving Belfast is rather lower but cannot be ruled out. Special preventive measures are called for at Aldergrove Airport, and on flights destined there from Great Britain. It is not necessary, however, to search

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passengers and their baggage on entry to the terminal at airports in Great Britain, as is the case at Belfast.

8 Carriage of Weapons and Explosives between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The PIRA remained intent on smuggling arms and explosives between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. The measures currently in operation to search all baggage must remain.

#### BACKGROUND TO THE THREAT

9 The PIRA despite the huge reverses they have suffered in the past 2 years remain a powerful terrorist force. Intelligence suggests that we are faced with a hard case of determined and clever men who are constantly probing the defences. They are capable of exploiting the slightest weakness in the system. They have failed significantly in recent months to achieve a "spectacular", and may be expected to grasp at any opportunity which might occur. Aviation is an important target and they are known to keep close watch on Aldergrove Airport. ←

→ It is their intention to disrupt or suspend aircraft services between Northern Ireland and Great Britain and they are well aware that successful sabotage of an aircraft on the ground, at Aldergrove or elsewhere, or an explosion at Aldergrove or another airport serving Belfast could achieve that result.

#### SECURITY MEASURES

10 The effectiveness of the existing measures has been proved conclusively over a long period. There has been no incident <sup>involving an aircraft</sup> since July 1974, nor is there any evidence to suggest that explosives or weapons have been conveyed by aircraft between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The use of other preventive measures to alleviate the inconvenience to passengers without reducing the effectiveness of the security has been considered.

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11 The use of X-ray screening devices in addition to manual search was rejected, since such devices are not capable of showing up small quantities of explosives. While sniffers may be of use where there is heat and air movement<sup>as</sup> on the body, they have not been found sufficiently effective in examining unopened cases.

12 Double searching of hand-baggage and persons at Aldergrove cannot be regarded as completely adequate to ensure with any degree of certainty that explosives or explosive device components could not be taken on board. The slight relaxation on the Belfast London shuttle service was possible because these travelling mingle for a much shorter time with arriving passengers.

#### CONCLUSIONS

13 The conclusion of the officials of Department of Trade, Northern Ireland Department of the Environment and the Ministry of Defence are:

1 The general threat to Civil Aviation in the Northern Ireland ~~case~~<sup>context</sup> or remain high and if anything slightly higher than earlier this year when the measures were last reviewed.

2 The main threats are of an explosion in an aircraft on the ground<sup>or</sup> an act of airport sabotage at Aldergrove or another serving Northern Ireland.

3 The existing measures have proved effective to meet the threat and should not be ~~disturbed~~<sup>changed</sup> in the present circumstances.

4 No alternative measures can be recommended to alleviate passenger inconvenience and at the same time give a similar degree of security at present.